

# SAMIZDAT

## Looking to a horizon of greys

No matter what side of the fence you're on, writes Neil Gaiman, any argument about censorship always winds up trying to defend the indefensible

WRITING THE clear, concise and convincing article on censorship I'd like to would be easier if I was more sure of myself. I'm not. I vacillate, easily led by a sensible-sounding argument one way or the other.

I'm against censorship.

I'm for freedom of speech, freedom to write and draw and broadcast without restriction.

I'm also against (among other things) sexism, gross exploitation, racism, fascism and clubbing baby seals to death.

So would I restrict the right of extreme right-wing groups to broadly disseminate anti-black (or anti-Semitic or whatever) material? Damn right I would... wouldn't I?

Dunno. On the one hand... The trouble with talking about censorship is you have to follow the arguments all the way, and no matter what side of the fence you're on when you begin, you always seem to wind up trying to defend the indefensible.

It's like those TV or radio debates about censorship. The ones where someone

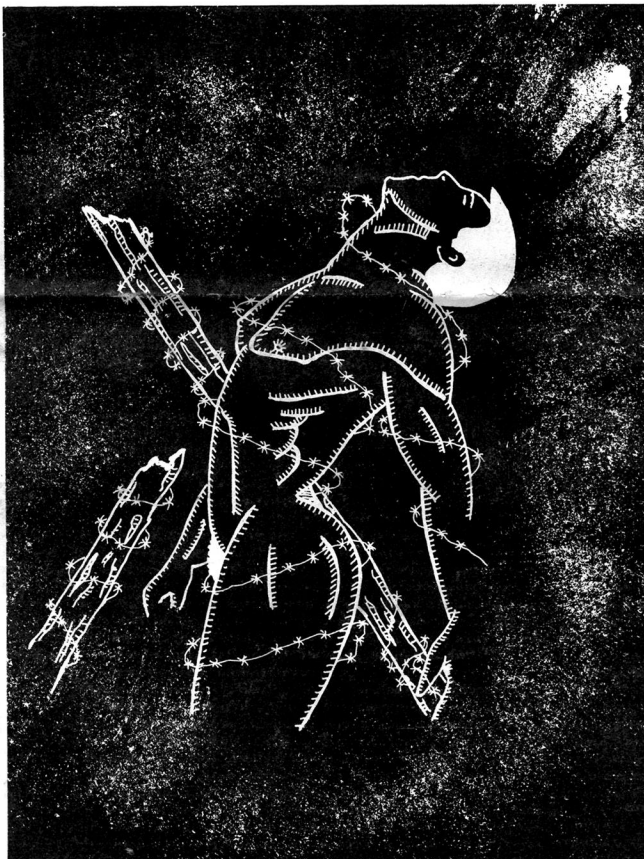
says, "Well, you don't have to read it. If you think it could upset you, if it might offend you, then leave it on the shelf. Don't buy it. Don't watch it. Turn it off."

And then someone else says, "Yes, but we have to protect the children from this stuff." And nobody ever asks WHY?, or WHAT FROM? They just go along with the buzz-words, and "children" gets a knee-jerk every time.

To judge from letters in the *Radio Times*, "protecting children" — normally from material with some kind of sexual content — means protecting adults from being asked questions they find embarrassing.

I can't imagine any child being harmed by knowing what a condom is. Confused possibly. Bored probably. But it's easier to explain to a small child what a condom is, or what those people are doing, than it is to answer most of their other television-inspired questions — for example, "Do Batman and He-Man know each other, and who'd win in a fight?"

Do I practice self-



censorship? Sure. I have to: what I write reflects my own preoccupations and beliefs. But then again, I would write something I personally considered offensive or unpleasant if that was where a story had to go to make its point.

The fact that we disagree with things doesn't necessarily mean we shouldn't talk about them, discuss them, look at them, comment on them or create art around them.

There is a tendency among even the most free-thinking of types to assume that My Censorship is Good and Yours is Bad. And at the end of the day, all I can offer is a hodge-podge of opinions, some fully formed, some still inchoate.

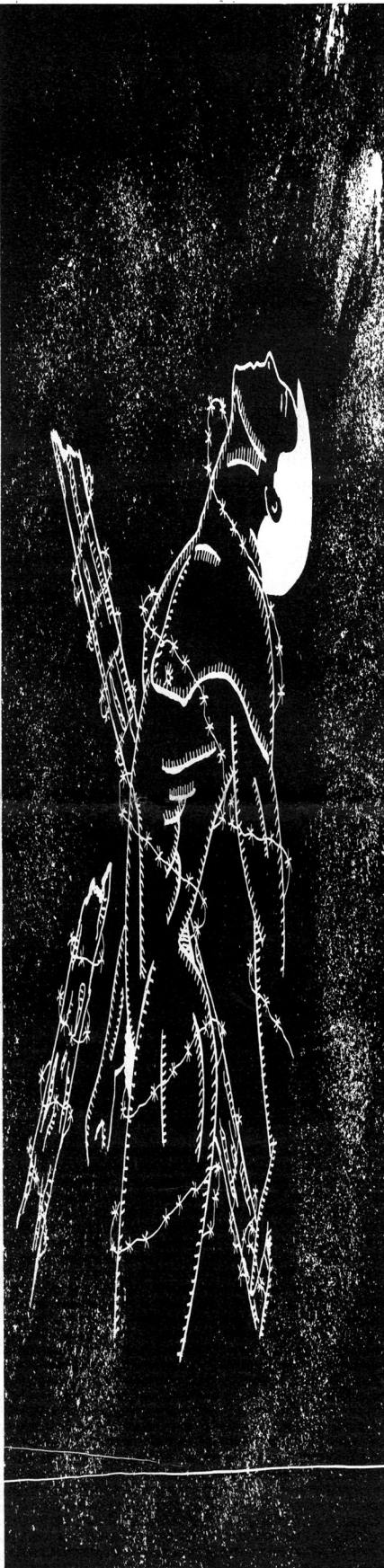
If this all seems unduly personal then I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned censorship is a personal issue, and that's the only level on which it can be discussed. It's not black and white, just

a million shades of grey, and the horizon shifts according to where you stand.

Opinions:

● I don't trust the censorship of the market. That something sells doesn't make it good. That something doesn't sell doesn't make it bad. Three million *Sun* readers can be wrong. As far as the market is concerned, censorship and attempted censorship can

● continued on page 4



# Sing a song of silence

I'VE COME across censorship a few times personally. Once, I had written a song called *Thrush*, about a young woman's romance leaving her with an uncomfortable legacy. The story was true and therefore I could not see how anyone

the record. Because of this one song.

At the time, I was more amused than upset, though I did feel a little indignant when I realised that someone's opinion had affected the distribution of something I had said and I had attempted to communicate.

I think in some cases it must be very satisfying to be a censor. Perhaps the post should be re-labelled "License to be an overruling bastard". Having the ability to stop someone influencing other people is a good way of attempting to keep society static, isn't it?

Conversely, were I a censor I'd censor things for being boring, and for keeping society static, even though they are risky (or rather, risqué). Endless rows of bomb-shaped, cow-sized

breasts and misogynist story-lines leave me cold, and the level of splatting in comics puts me off from reading them.

But, watching *Tom and Jerry* never made me violent, and I always used to identify with James Bond himself, not his silly female sidekicks, even when they had "hard" exteriors.

If there's still a need for the exploits of cow-woman and bull-man, it's a sign of the lack of imagination in artists and writers and a lack of maturity in their customers, the readers.

Don't laugh at people who put stickers on sexist advertisements and don't prosecute people who burn down porno establishments. They are doing us all a favour!

HELEN McCOOKERYBOOK  
singer

**CENSORED**

could find it offensive at all.

The song found its way on to an EP that our band recorded. And although it was actually played by a commercial radio station in Birmingham, our distributors took offence and said they were not prepared to push

## Publishing 'dirty wimmen'

WRITING AS a formally chastised pornographer (the chastiser being a judge at Bow Street Court rumoured to be the dad of an orange-moustachioed multi-media entrepreneur whose name I dare not put to script), I suppose I must be a member of a fairly minute elite of Published Dirty Wimmen.

*A Tale of FRESH WILLIES*

Once upon a time I wrote a black humour satire on sex in comic form which was published in the US. The book opened with a piss-take on *The Story of O* by Pauline Reage. But instead of having a woman victimised by the sexual appetites of a man, it featured several men in a basement being toyed with by a woman. It's title was, of course, *In Debauchment*.

The book closed with a classical Sumerian folk legend called *The Last Mother-God* which gives amusing (to some of us) details about how men's fears of women finally drove the Goddess from her throne.

After being in print for several years in the US, the book became illegal in Britain in 1985.

After my comic were all burned (by the way, until the bust, they had been fully available on the racks at Virgin Records), I did a story on the bust for *Anarchy Comic No 4* called *Public Enemy*, which is available at Virgin (until further notice, of course).

What do I think of censorship? As long as it's around, it keeps people excited about

something that would otherwise become a daily reality—in other words, boring.

And as long as sexual desire is put in the same category as radical thinking, I'm afraid it will always continue

**CENSORED**

to be the so-called dirty girlie magazines that carry the inside story on what our religious and political leaders are really up to.

Censorship, like prohibition, keeps prices high and quality low. It's great news for businessmen and bad news for artists.

MELINDA GEBBIE  
artist

## Suffer little children. . .

IN THE real world, violence happens every day; sex happens every day. None of the comics we publish or distribute have been involved in acts of violence or sex with their readers. They do contain, some of them, pictures of and words about violence and sex. But, in the end, they are "Only lines on paper, folks!"

Not only Customs officers (who really do judge a book by looking at its cover—they seized *Fun in Bed*, a book of games for sick children, and *Rape Around our Coast*, a study of soil erosion) and the Obscene Publications Branch (whose flying squad sports a tie showing a book being cut by

a pair of scissors) want to ban comics.

Even some otherwise tolerant people become censors over violence and

**CENSORED**

sex in comics. S Clay Wilson, for example, is often castigated for his drawing of excessive violence and huge genitals. Many people don't like velvet paintings of hydrocephalic children with plates of gravy for eyes, but no shouts for censorship are

heard in their case, even though they are as far removed from the real world as Wilson's drawings.

Not all art is pleasant or tasteful. (Not all art is good, but let's not ban bad art.) Goya, Hogarth, Grosz, Rowlandson and other examples of rape, torture and bestiality all hang in national art galleries, which encourage children by charging them half price!!

Meanwhile, censors queue up to prevent us selling a few copies of sometimes unpleasant, sometimes disturbing comic art, drawn by real artists, to adults.

Funny old world.

TONY BENNETT  
publisher

# KATHY ACKER



photo by Kate Simon

## UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER

MY FEELING about censorship — and we're talking now about legal censorship, about laws — is that those people who make the laws do what's good for them. What that means is that they'll censor things for political reasons. I'm not even talking about the issue now of whether certain sexual materials are morally good or bad. I'll get to that.

But my overriding fear about censorship, and what I've seen happen again and again, is that what you find is political censorship. Even generally, if you look at sexual censorship — we're talking about legal sexual censorship — is you find those forms of sexuality censored which are not of or supporting the nuclear family. Why?

Why would anyone censor two women or two men who make love in a bed as totally consenting adults? The usual reason given, if you examine the statements of the Moral Majority in America and people like that, is that they're using sex for reasons other than procreation.

Why would anyone care whether two people have children or don't have children? Because — and I'm putting this very simply — the foundation of the capitalist and post-capitalist bourgeois society is the nuclear family, and you need that foundation in order to maintain the political and economic structure. So that deviance from the nuclear family is... I wouldn't say it's revolution against the society, but it's an act of going against the society. And that cannot be maintained. And I really think that's at the base of all legal censorship.

The other issue is morality. We're only talking about consenting sexual acts. Non-consenting sexual acts such as rape are acts of violence, and

are criminal in the same sense that murder or anything else would be criminal. I mean, if one person does something against another person without that other person's consent, that's a crime. That's an act of unasked-for violence, whether sexual or not.

I think sometimes sex gets into conversations where it really shouldn't be and the issues are quite clear if you don't have sex in the... issue. We'd all be quite clear — except for a few nutcases — that acts of violence that are not asked for that go from one person to another person — make that plural, people — are basically detrimental.

Now if you're talking about consenting sexual acts... I don't want to just say "Anybody has the freedom to do what they want" — we can get rid of some of that pap. But my fear is that... I'll take a very definite example:

Two women friends of mine understand very well the prejudice against homosexuality, and they fight against it. At the same time, they do not understand sadomasochism. I don't like using that word because it means a whole variety of behaviour, but I'm just going to use it for the argument. They do not understand and they do not approve at all. That is, within a certain range of the feminist canon, there is a feeling that violence is not allowable.

Now if you accept sadomasochistic behaviour — and I don't want to hear that vanilla stuff about "Oh, we're just acting parts" — what you are accepting is that there is a real desire in some people to hurt and there is a desire in other people to be hurt. And that these desires are of a sexual nature.

That doesn't mean that the person who wants to hurt is a mass murderer. It means that you have to have a view of human nature in which certain kinds of violence or certain ways of dealing with violence are there and allowable. Now that is a very, very radical position and one which — despite all the trendiness of S and M — very, very few people accept.

So you find such prejudice against S and M that it isn't even really discussed. And wearing rubber in *Skin Two* and everything doesn't get near the issue. The issue is violence.

My fear, when we get on to morality, is that one person's morality is not another's. That people who are very good on the homosexual issue are not good on the S and M issue.

I have to use these words because I have to denote certain ranges of sexual activity. There are many others. Sexual activity is probably as unnameable and varied as any other human reality on this earth. And for that reason, unless we're talking about real criminal behaviour as I described it earlier, I very much distrust moral discussions that have to do with sexuality. Or perhaps more accurately, I don't distrust discussion, I distrust any legislation that would come out of the discussion.

I distrust anything that doesn't keep the discussions open-ended, anything that doesn't allow people to try to understand what the other is like. And I mean the *real* other, the thing they are having trouble understanding. And I very much distrust laws which seek to govern an area which we really do not understand.

Taken from an interview conducted by Don Melia.



# The rape of imagination

**BEWARE:** THE truest censor in the world is you, yourself. Only you will ultimately decide your own actions.

The closer we get to the 20th century's finale, the more corrupt and dispassionate the established power elites become. These people are, of course, the least equipped to make decisions about what should or should not be seen by the population at large.

The censorship concept implies a lack of trust between people and an acceptance that we should only be allowed what we are fed, without any choice in the matter.

One of the greatest battles of the 20th century has been the onslaught on the imagination; in Britain today, the imagination is



almost illegal. Never has censorship in its various media guises been more profuse. Never has the power of the media been more absolute.

The media establishment is ruled by a climate of fear — fear not to go beyond

limits set by the right-wing "moral majority" crusade. *The Sun* has no scruples about attacking "the other side", and it is free to weave its reality of lies. But any attack on the power elites is nipped in the bud and squashed.

Mainstream communication is becoming very closely controlled by the market economists, leaving us in a position where we must organise and produce our own means of communication.

The imagination is one of our greatest gifts. The more we stimulate it, the healthier and spiritually richer the world becomes. So let us not censor ourselves just to accept the patronage of power. Let us feast on our imagination and foster hope.

## Votes for a dollar democracy

**CENSORSHIP** SCARES me shitless. The inclination to say: "I don't like this — it should be banned!", as opposed to: "I don't like this — so I won't read/watch/listen to it," is one that I neither agree with nor fully understand.

Being a cynical and naturally neurotic individual, I can only assume that those who seek to censor are involved in the pursuit of power.

After all, if you're going to spend millions of pounds on a film, or thousands of pounds on a comic, you'd be better off making sure it's not going to get banned before you spend all that dosh rather than after.

And who better to ask than the self-appointed guardians of morality? I say "self-appointed" because in all the years Mary Whitehouse has appeared on our television screens, I still do not know who the hell she represents! How many people voted her into office?

A lot of people will probably disagree with me, but I believe in c. Dollar Democracy. Every penny in your pocket is a vote, just as powerful as any X you ever placed on any ballot. Every one of us has the opportunity to censor any book/comic/film/record or item of clothing by not spending our hard-earned dole on it.

Financial censorship is the sternest, and swiftest, of all.

**BAMBOS**  
news editor,  
Speakeasy

*The views expressed in this article are not those of Acme Press Ltd.*

## When expediency, not taste, has to call the tune

**SKIN TWO** is a magazine that operates on the sexual fringe, and, as such, is constantly in the censorship firing line.

Championing, as it does, fetishism and sadomasochism as valid aspects of human sexuality, it is published in the knowledge that each issue could be the last if someone, somewhere decided to prosecute.

If you've seen *Skin Two*, and have any idea what kind of S and M-oriented material is freely available outside Britain, you might wonder how its mild-mannered content could possibly cause concern. The fact that it does do so in some circles indicates just how limited our range of free expression in Britain has become.

*Skin Two* is passionately anti-censorship. We believe that people should have unrestricted access to information, imagery and ideas that are of interest to them. But we have to deal with the real world while postulating the ideal one. And so, while Britain's moral values remain those of a Victorian nanny, we impose self-censorship to survive.

By this, I don't mean simply that we exercise "taste". Taste is a form of self regulation used by all publications, and we apply it as rigorously as any. In our case, it means searching out good quality photography and art, trying to make sure we maintain a high standard of writing, and rejecting any advertisements

we regard as tacky.

Beyond this, however, we have a relationship with a distributor to maintain, and beyond that, an image in the eyes of the law. And here it's not taste but expediency that calls the tune.

We can't afford to have our distributor refusing to take the magazine for fear of prosecution any more than we can afford to be prosecuted ourselves, so we compromise.

We believe that, in Britain's sexually repressive climate, it's better to be able to publish *something* of genuine value than to publish nothing at all because you've been closed down. So we exclude certain very familiar kinds of S and M imagery from the pages of *Skin Two*, and take other steps as well to show that we are a "responsible" publication.

We take no particular pleasure in denying our readers the more explicit aspects of S and M iconography; we just hope that our "responsible" attitude will help to make the sexuality that motivates the magazine better understood and more acceptable, as it already appears to have done for the general public, if not our "moral guardians".

Yes, we exist for freedom of expression. But in Britain at the moment, we can only continue to exist *without* it.

**ANTHONY GRAHAM**  
associate editor,  
*Skin Two*



IT'S A very difficult thing to talk about, censorship, because it's not something that's preoccupied me ever. I know that sounds absolutely extraordinary, but there were so many other things to preoccupy me that censorship was never a thing that did.

Obviously, the censorship in this country operates on different levels. For instance, there is a film censor but there is not a book censor or a painting censor. My first encounter with the censor was over *Jubilee*.

In point of fact, I thought that *Sebastiane* might be censored, but I did a very English thing. I happened to know someone who knew the censor at that time and I showed them the film a week or so before, knowing that they were to meet the censor at a party. I did it the English way and *Sebastiane* wasn't censored at all.

I don't know if what I did actually worked. Maybe it would never have been censored in any case. I don't know. But I did do that, so there was a point when I thought that censorship might intervene in my work.

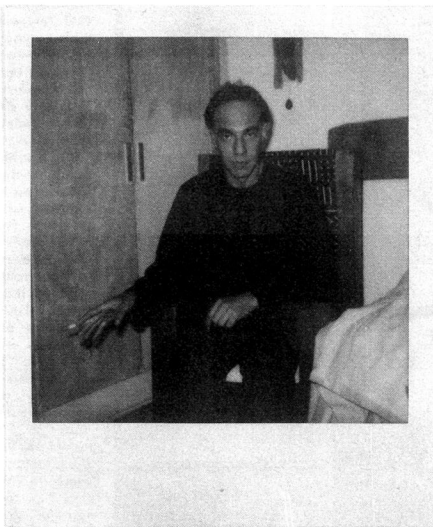
In *Jubilee*, the censor wanted to make five cuts, rather a large amount... Now these are actually practical observations on the censor. What you do here if you make a film is that you are then able to take the censor out to lunch and argue with him. He is not a government censor. He is actually paid for by the film industry itself, the idea being that it would defend the industry against the possibility of private prosecutions.

I argued him through all the sections of *Jubilee* which he wanted to cut. I said that it seemed to me that the people who were committing the violence in the film were women and this was more likely to turn men off than inflame them. I think he saw the logic in that, but then he said to me, "Well, I have a job as a censor, therefore I have to censor your film. Because if I don't censor this film I will be under attack from the Right and it could jeopardise my job. I try and keep a mean average in this situation and attempt not to censor serious work, but unless I am seen to do some cuts..."

So what he did in the end, he said, "I have to have a cut in this film, Derek, and sex and violence is the area I am most worried about. I want you to cut the pink polythene sheets." And I said, "Can I do that myself?" And he said, "Of course you may. I am not actually going to say that the scissors have to go in at that point. I want approximately five seconds out of it." And since the scene was very long, it actually wasn't cut. In other words, the scene's not cut because it actually happens — it's just a bit shorter.

His reasoning was very interesting in that he thought *Jubilee* would be a popular film — and in the event it

# DEREK JARMAN



## PAINTING MOVING PICTURES

wasn't, of course, no one liked it very much at that time — and that if it became a popular film it would be more dangerous. But if it was to play in an art cinema it was OK. In other words, there was a hierarchy in the way they censored at the time.

I got hammered for doing that cut myself, and it's the only censorship I have directly experienced in any of my films. It was a catch 22 situation — I had to censor it because the film had to be on. Otherwise, we would have all gone broke and that would have been it — no one would have seen the film in any case.

Then you come to the hidden censorship that you cannot prove. This is the censorship by what is called consensus. In other words, at the moment we are allowed to do this, that and the other. This is much more the case with television, and one of the problems with cinema is that it is now television. I mean, let's face it — there is no such thing as cinema any longer, it's all television. At least in this country it is. The sort of films that I make would be made for Channel 4, and are therefore not any longer cinema — they are television.

And there you enter into another whole world where there is another censorship body, the IBA, and there is the commissioning editors'

fear of stepping out... Whereas somehow, when you were making feature films, your producers were not as worried about that. If anything, they wanted you to push the boundaries.

So you enter into a world where, for instance, if you are a gay film-maker you have problems, because the television companies are likely to say, "Well, we've done our quota of gay films this year and therefore we're not going to make any more."

One of the problems in my sort of film-making — and it has to come back to one's own personal observations — was the advent of some liberals like Channel 4. They very quickly bought my films before they went on air and I believe — although they would deny this hotly — they felt they rather difficult to transmit. So while they were not transmitting them, which was for several years, and as they moved into being the only way of making independent films in this country, I was actually kept away from film-making. For instance, they turned down *Caravaggio*, although their name appeared on it eventually because they got the BFI to make it so they could step behind the BFI. And the whole palaver of making my films became involved with the slightly broader issues of censorship when Channel 4

finally did show them, standing behind the critic of The Times. In other words, it was the critic David Robinson's personal choice of films. He decided to put my three films on because it had become a bit of a scandal in those film-making circles that absolutely everyone who had made a feature film in this country had had it shown except for myself.

And of course it got muddled up with the Churchill censorship bill — the video censorship bill in 1985 — and this ricocheted right through the year.

The interesting thing about the films being shown on television was that they were shown very deliberately in the wrong order: *Tempest* first, in order to soften up the audience; *Jubilee* second, which was felt to be less offensive; and then *Sebastiane*.

They asked me to do two cuts in *Sebastiane* for television, which were "Come on motherfucker" — they wouldn't put that word on, so that was changed to "mother's boy" — and they raked down the erect penis. That, in any case, was illegal... not illegal, but censorable in the eyes of the cinema. I think it was the first erect cock that had got into the cinema in this country — at least officially, through the censor.

When I shot it, I shot it

deliberately down at the bottom of the frame, so that it only appears when you're showing it 1:175. When you do it 1:185 it's cut off. And I showed the film to the censors 1:185, so they didn't see it, so it went through.

What was interesting about that was that some of the cinemas don't have 1:175, so I was getting letters saying the film had been censored because people hadn't seen the erect cock. That was because it was being screened at different ratios — it wasn't cut out.

But anyway, in the event, *Jubilee* was the one everyone was upset by, much more than *Sebastiane*. It was the film that Churchill was most upset by. At one point, I was asked to come on *Right to Reply* to defend it, but then they rang me up and said they didn't want me. Obviously it had become too hot, so Jeremy Isaacs defended me. Then the business of *Caravaggio* became central.

I'm not saying that I censored myself on *Caravaggio* because I'd always wanted to make the film that way. Everyone was expecting it to be a violent and sexy film and I wanted to concentrate more on the painting. But it was actually rather fortuitous that I did, because that became very important in the whole debate.

When it won the Silver Bear at Berlin early in the year, while all this debate was going on in Parliament, the television companies were immediately on to me — doing telephone interviews and sending camera crews over. Because obviously it could be used as a defence: "This is art. This is the sort of thing that is given Silver Bears in Berlin. You're being provincial." And that became part of the argument against this impending censorship bill.

The bill went down on the day that *Caravaggio* opened, which I think is a sort of irony. It only went down for the time being, because obviously all of this is still going on. One really has to look at the whole climate — what is viewable in this country and what isn't.

There you are in really murky territory, because what we have is the self-censorship that goes on through television. What does the IBA let on, what does it not let on? What is commissioned and how daring can the editors be? And how free are they really to commission things? My feeling is that it is very tightly controlled, because when one knows what the cinema could do, and is able to do...

It's in the way that one actually doesn't do things oneself in a certain way because one knows one will never get them funded. What I meant to do and what I didn't do, I'm not certain. I don't think I censored myself, but I think a lot of people do.

Taken from an interview conducted by Don Melia.

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●continued from page 1

have their uses. James Branch Cabell was an unknown author until Boston tried to ban *Jurgen*, and I doubt *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament* has been harmed by the extensive press coverage it received. But there are still films I'd like to see, books I'd like to read, which the police or customs will not permit in the country.

●There are limits beyond which, even without censorship, I don't feel we should go. I don't hold with snuff movies, any more than I hold with murder (although I do believe murder exists, while I suspect snuff movies are an urban myth). But that videos and movies should be banned or cut because somebody who was obviously not harmed (I have seen no reports of the entire British Board of Film Classification going mad en masse — raping, pillaging, and putting people to the sword) should decide that the General Public would be if they were allowed to see, say, *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, is ludicrous. If adults want to watch horror movies, fine. To be honest, I wouldn't stop kids watching horror movies. Correction — I wouldn't stop my kids watching horror movies, although I'd want to be there when they did so; I wouldn't prevent you stopping yours.

●Good and Bad art tend to be matters of opinion. You can have your Good art if I can have mine. I find it upsetting that, for example, Dori Seda's *Lonely Nights* — probably the most interesting and personal underground comic in years — is banned by customs because of its sexual content. I'm quite sure a number of people would consider it to have no redeeming features; but I think it's remarkable, and I'd like other people who might enjoy it to be able to read it as well. I'd never force anyone to read it, just as I wouldn't expect anyone to force me to read *Soldier of Fortune*, the *Care Bears Comic* or the *National Front Manifesto*.

It is unfortunate that we do not live in a perfect world. But nothing was ever gained by suppressing books, films, opinions, comics or stories. There can't be a thin end of the wedge, no matter how attractive it seems.

Whether it is for or against the established order, apparently endorses violence to women, baby seals, yuppies or gays; whether it's the kind of censorship we'd like to see (which it's polite not to call censorship — one ought to euphemise) or the kind we wouldn't, it's still censorship, and it still stinks.

Discourse, education and the right to reply are better bets — and for them it helps to be able to see what you're talking about.

That's my opinion. But that's all it is. And I'm sticking to it. Unless someone can convince me otherwise.



## When 'lowbrow' art dares to aspire

**KNOCKABOUT COMICS'** *Outrageous Tales from the Old Testament* presents the Bible as you've never seen it before — as a comic strip. "Twisted and sick" was *The Sun's* verdict. And let's face it, *The Sun* should know all about being twisted and sick.

The trouble with the gutter press is that it's so busy fabricating sick, twisted stories that it can't believe that the stories of incest, mutilation and rape in *Outrageous Tales* are lifted straight from the Bible.

But it's the strict adherence to the original biblical text that has offended various members of the clergy and Tory MPs. They don't like to be reminded that orgies, bestiality and just about every kind of murder you can name (as well as several you can't!) are tucked away in the Bible. They work on the theory that if you ignore them they'll go away. But the fact remains that the Bible — especially the Old Testament — is full of gruesome examples of man's inhumanity to man as well as God's inhumanity to man. Maybe it's the Bible itself that needs censoring and sanitising...

For as long as we can remember, the Bible has been put on a pedestal. Any

attempts to challenge it, discuss it, lampoon it or in any way make it more accessible to a greater reading public are considered open to charges of blasphemy.

A lot of the anger about *Outrageous Tales* has been directed at the fact that it uses comic strips. The comic strip form in itself is seen as an art form to be censored, as can be seen by the attacks on the recently published comic strip versions of famous operas. Sure, it's OK to show Sodom and Gomorrah in a painting or book — preferably 18th century or earlier — because that's "art". But God forbid that you use a comic strip.

The comic strip is a trash medium, with little status. It's generally assumed that comics are for kids, dopeheads and any thicko who can't cope with a book. The comic strip as a medium in itself offends because it is not considered elite enough for the serious topic of religion.

And what could be more elitist than the Bible, with its obscure mythological and historical references and its inaccessible language?

What does "begat" mean, anyway...?

JULIE HOLLINGS  
artist

## The image in question

**TRINA ROBBINS'** piece in the first issue of *Heartbreak Hotel* expresses the terms of the censorship debate in a wilfully naive way. The reason no sane, progressive person can favour censorship is that we face a massive roll forward of the power of a right-wing ideology of The Family, The State and the maintenance of sexual conformity, all of these seen as imperative to the creation of a docile, or at least a cowed, workforce.

It has been an act of the worst kind of myopia for figures like Andrea Dworkin in the US and Clare Short and Michael Moorcock here to become the standard bearers of pro-censorship legislation, which, to whatever extent it is intended to protect the rights of women, cannot fail to be co-opted and utilised by the "moral majority" and their amoral authoritarian allies. This is why many people fetishise the fight against censorship as if it were enough.

Of course, I oppose images which degrade women, and images which degrade other minorities. It is important that these be discussed and derided, and that we

are sure what images it is that do degrade women. Domestic images that show women as dependent and content to remain that way — images constantly portrayed in sitcoms, commercials and soaps — are far more dangerous than the images of women presented in comics most of the time, though the record of comics is far from good.

Many images are twofold in the values they purvey: a tight costume on a woman character can be read and can be presented as either fetishistically objectifying or as sexually and physically empowering. It is not the graphic depiction of rape that is pernicious; it is its presentation in ways which allow male readers to indulge in vicarious and guilt-free fantasies of participation.

While giving no ground at all to censorship, aware people working in the comics industry must continually discuss these issues, but do so in ways that take on board the complexity of human power and human response to imagery.

ROZ KAVENEY  
journalist

As the light  
of reason  
goes dim

# Condemning hearts as well as minds

CENSORSHIP IS cropping up frequently nowadays. On TV, *The Singing Detective* shocked hypocritical *Sun* readers; *EastEnders* had too many bender scenes...

Marvel Comics bowed to pressure by the "Parents of America" by dropping a hinted gay character (Northstar). DC, on the other hand, stuck to it's guns, publishing *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen*.

Today, a "moral majority" is spoken of, with Mary Whitehouse leading the campaign. They do, of course, have the right to their views. Michael Grade once said that he may not always agree with her, but she does represent a body that *does* exist in our society. A valid point. The difficult part is to gain the balance. To get everything in perspective.

Current violent events and the new sexual morality imposed by AIDS seem to have whipped the public into a panicked frenzy. Too many scare-stories are being blasted at us by the gutter press, and the way they are presented seems to feed off the very horror of the material shown.

And in the midst of all this hysteria left, right and centre, the light of reason is fading fast.

ISKANDER ISLAM  
artist

CLAUSE 28 (previously 27) of the 1987 Local Government Bill, amended by Jill Knight and David Wilshire, was added at the last minute to prevent proper consideration and imprecisely worded to allow the broadest interpretation in law.

Playing on the popular misconception that children are "taught homosexuality" in schools, it will, in fact, effectively destroy existing lesbian and gay lifestyles and suppress all knowledge of them.

To close gay clubs and pubs, to ban homosexual

literature from libraries and films and plays from performance, remove equal opportunities protection and stop groups meeting on council premises, the Bill says:

● "A local authority shall not promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality."

To foster a new generation of bigots (attacks on homosexuals have increased tenfold in the last two years, and the attackers are usually youths of 15 to 21) and to ensure the misery and isolation

of young gays and lesbians (their attempted suicide rate is already one in five, and a tenth are thrown out of home), it forbids the provision of accurate information about homosexuality in schools and the employment of openly gay teachers, saying:

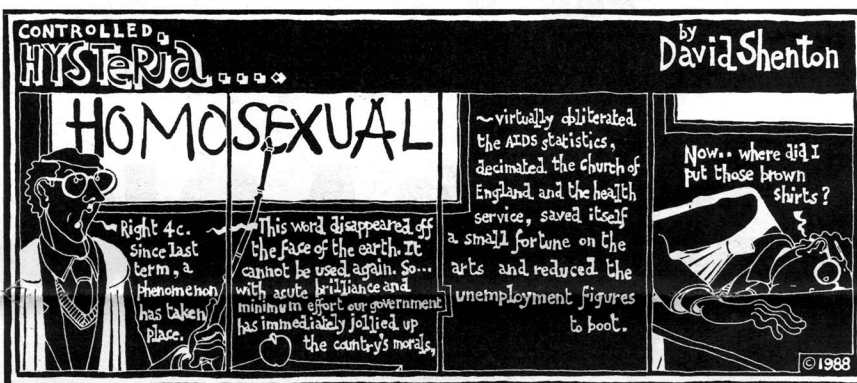
● "A local authority shall not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship by the publication of such material or otherwise."

To further cut off and silence the lesbian and gay

community, local authorities cannot fund helplines, community centres, support groups, counselling or advice schemes because the Bill says:

● "A local authority shall not give financial or other assistance to any person for either of the purposes referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) above."

Starting with homosexuals, this Bill provides a precedent for legislation to remove the civil rights of any group the government considers undesirable. Who's next?



Cartoon © David Shenton. Appeared originally in Capital Gay.

## Why censor when you can 'categorise'?

WHEN DC introduced its rating system last year, four of the industry's biggest names announced that they wouldn't be working for DC as long as this system was in practice.

To some this seemed like an over-reaction. After all, DC had only instituted its system to help protect the front-line troops: the retailers. Shops had already been raided, and since items as innocuous as *Wonder Woman* and the *X-Men* had been removed from the shelves, the industry could be facing some serious trouble.

If the ghost of Frederic Wertham was stalking the land, then surely it was better to institute some self-discipline, rather than risk the heavy hand of Congress. And a rating system wasn't "censorship", just a guideline for parents and retailers. "Suggested for mature readers", that kind of thing. Nothing would be banned — it would

merely be categorised.

But did you ever wonder why the video version of a movie will sometimes be missing a piece of nudity, or cussing, or ultraviolence, that the big-screen version had included? Categorisation, that's why.

When the "video nasty" crackdown came, the government decided that videos would henceforth be subject to stricter rating. Nothing would be banned, as such — in fact, there would be even greater freedom within the new "18R" category.

Ever seen a video cassette bearing the legend "18R"? I thought not. The category was only to be available through licensed "adults only" shops, and this effectively meant that the industry would have to flag its wares through sex shops. Since this would have been commercial suicide on the industry's part, "18R" films just don't exist.

Uncut versions of Cronen-

berg and Peckinpah have vanished from the shelves, as has virtually all soft pornography. But these films have not been officially banned. They have just been placed in a category that no one can see.

DC abandoned its rating system pretty quickly, but the damage has been done. Wertham's ghost has heard, once again, that even we — godless commie bastards that we are — agree with him: the people need guidance. Hopefully it was too busy investigating the sexual mores of presidential candidates and TV evangelists to wonder if suggesting that *Swamp Thing* be read only by the mature actually stopped retailers from selling it to under-18s. Hopefully.

But we could yet find ourselves having to buy *Swamp Thing* from Ann Summers. If we're lucky.

PETER HOGAN  
journalist

## When being provocative is seen as provocation

READERS OF comics, probably even more than watchers of television, are fed a heady diet of sex, violence and horror. In many cases, the artist (be he writer or draughtsman) is honestly using this imagery to illuminate some aspect of the human condition, or — as in the case of the bondage and torture (of naked women) comic book I was looking at recently — for bald commercial gain. In each case, the basic need to grab attention through the use of provocative imagery is the primary motive behind its obsessive use.

Comics, for my taste, are too fixated with violence. That means I have something in common with the pro-censorship lobby! I think the violent orientation of comics hinders their bid to be accepted by a more literate audience.

The pro-censorship people think that comics lead people to eternal damnation, or somesuch nonsense,

and would have them cleaned up by force. Any form of censorship is the thin end of a very large wedge and would be thoroughly unhealthy. Given a free hand, the excesses of the censors would be more widespread and destructive than the worst excesses of porno comics.

Even when he isn't dishing out pornography, the artist, if he is in any way sensitive to the woes of the world, is an angry man. He wants to make a bit of noise. That is his role.

We have here the following scenario: the artist's legitimate right to express himself and provoke a response in his audience is seen by sections of that audience as just that — a provocation — and they will find ways to have it stopped. The terrier snapping at the leg of the postman will eventually get a kick!

BRIAN BOLLAND  
artist